

UK Safety Alert

Contractor Struck by Falling Cage

Details of the Incident

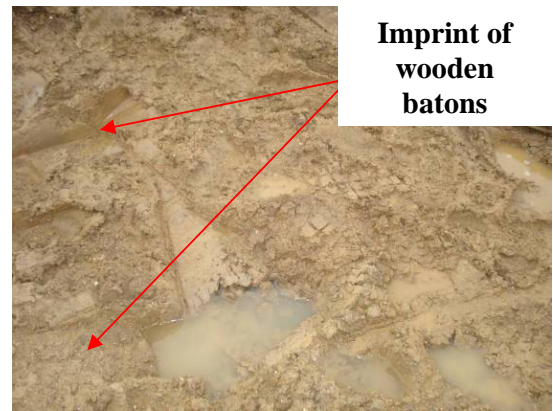
During work on a construction project, a gas bottle cage was being positioned close to the work area in preparation for some cutting and welding work. Two wooden batons were positioned on the ground to spread the load of the cage and provide a level footing; the cage was then lifted onto the wooden batons using a 360° excavator with lifting hook and chains. After settling the cage on the batons the lifting chain was removed and the excavator arm moved away. A short while after the cage was released from the lifting chain it suddenly started to topple toward where the Contract Supervisor was standing with his back to the cage (about 1.5m away). As the cage started to fall, a warning was shouted, but the Supervisor was unable to move his leg out of the way fast enough due to suction from the muddy ground, his leg was trapped by the top of the bottle cage. The cage was lifted off and emergency services summoned to site, the contractor was found to have suffered a multiple fracture to his lower left leg.



Gas Bottle Cage



One of the wooden batons



General ground conditions showing the imprint of the wooden batons

Learning Points

The risk of the cage falling over had been identified and led to the decision to use the wooden batons to provide a stable base. However, the ground conditions had not been fully taken into account and the batons settled in the mud causing the cage to tilt and fall.

- **Risk Assessment – Whilst the task that was going to be performed (the cutting and welding of a pipeline) had been risk assessed and a method statement prepared, the setting up of the work area was not formally assessed.** Do risk assessments cover the preparation for a task as well as the actual task itself? Do risk assessments take into account weather/ground conditions?
- **Lifting – On releasing the lifting attachment from the cage no further checks were made to ensure the cage was stable.** When lifting or moving equipment, is prior consideration given as to whether it will be stable when placed into position and are checks carried out to ensure that the item is stable before removing the securing apparatus? Is a suitable exclusion zone established during lifting and placing operations?
- **Design – The cage had a height to width ratio of 3.4:1 and whilst it may have been fairly stable on a level hard surface, this would not be the case on any slight slope or uneven ground.** The cage should have been made secure or a different type of cage used, more suited to the ground conditions. Another option may have been to use a mobile cutting/welding unit. Is the suitability of equipment taken into account for tasks? Are alternatives considered to suit the conditions?